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ABSTRACT

Although parent involvement in school decision-making is required by law in Montreal, there is not necessarily a high level of parent participation. This study attempted to discover how parents feel about their involvement in the elementary and high schools. Subjects completing questionnaires included 255 families of the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal. Findings indicate that 85 percent of parents feel satisfied with the quality of their children's education and 84 percent feel welcome in their children's schools. On the whole, however, parents do not feel as involved in school decision-making as they want to be. They feel particularly deprived in areas that influence children directly such as school closure, recording information about pupils, and reporting pupil progress. Of all activities surveyed, fund raising activities are the ones in which they feel the most involved, yet they feel deprived of influence even in this area. The questionnaire used in the study is included. (Author/JM)

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HOW DO THE PARENTS OF THE PROTESTANT SCHOOL BOARD OF GREATER MONTREAL FEEL ABOUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL DECISIONS

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HOW DO PARENTS OF THE PROTESTANT SCHOOL BOARD OF GREATER MONTREAL FEEL ABOUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL DECISIONS

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1. Introduction: Bill 27 established school committees to involve parents by means of consultation in the decision making process in the school. Thus by law all schools have school committees, but it would be a fallacy to assume that this automatically ensures parent participation. To what extent are parents involved in decision making in the schools, and to what extent do they want to be involved? Do they wish to be involved more in certain areas than in others? Do parents feel welcome in The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal schools? With these questions in mind this study was undertaken. (Appendix I)

II. Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to investigate how parents feel about decision making in specific areas at the elementary and high school levels. The following areas were studied:

A.
1. Selection of textbooks.
2. Disciplinary procedures.
3. Introduction of new methods of instruction.
4. Introduction of new subjects.
5. Fund raising.
6. Evaluation of new methods and subjects.
7. Reporting pupil progress.
8. Recording information about pupils.
9. Alterations to school facilities.
10. Closing of schools (for reasons of declining enrolments).
11. Budgeting of school funds.
12. Community use of the school building.
13. Types of extra-curricular activities.
14. Pupil placement.

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B. In each of the above categories parents are asked to rate their actual level of participation and their desired level of participation. A five point rating scale is used. The score of one represents the lowest level of participation, while a score of five indicates the highest level. By comparing actual level of participation scores we are able to determine:

i. the perceived level of parent participation.
ii. the desired level of parent participation.
iii. the extent to which parents feel deprived in the decision making process at the school level.

Also an attempt is made to determine parent perception of their effectiveness at the school and community levels, since this efficacy influences their motivation to participate.
In addition parent-school contact and parent reception in the school are surveyed.

C. The parents are questioned about their opinions on selection and evaluation of teachers and principals.

III. Sample: The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal was selected as the school board to be surveyed. The proposal for the study was submitted to the Board's Central Parents Committee which endorsed the project and agreed to provide financial assistance.
Out of a total enrolment of 52,157 students, comprising twenty-three high schools and seventy-three elementary schools, ten high schools and eighteen elementary schools were investigated.
A total of 539 questionnaires plus follow-up letters were mailed. 47.3% or 255 questionnaires were returned. Those canvassed were families from:

i. ten high schools chosen at random. Every fiftieth family was involved.
ii. eighteen elementary schools representing every fourth elementary school in alphabetical order. Every twentieth family was involved.
iii. school committee chairmen when not selected from the above categories.

III. Sample - cont'd.

These twenty-eight schools selected to receive the questionnaire serve an urban population ranging through districts which are inner-city, lower middle-class, middle-class, suburban and affluent. The average student population of the high schools is 900 and that of the elementary schools is 300. 34.1% or 87 of the questionnaires were answered by parents of elementary children, while 29.8% or 76 were answered by parents of high school pupils. 36.7% or 92 of the respondents were parents of students in both the elementary and the high school. Further analysis shows that 52.2% or 133 of the responding parents are male, and 47.8% or 122 are female. In addition 98% or 249 of the parents replying desire their children to extend their education to high school and beyond.

IV. Analysis: Part I

Key - Elementary = Parents of elementary school children
High school = Parents of high school children
Both = Parents with children at both levels
Total = Sum total of parent response

1. a. Have you ever been a member of a Home and School Association?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
Yes	53.9%	55.3%	57.1%	55.5%
No	46.1%	44.7%	42.9%	44.5%

b. Have you ever been a member of a School Committee?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
Yes	22.5%	18.4%	27.5%	22.0%
No	77.5%	81.6%	72.5%	77.0%

77.0% of the parents have never served on a School Committee as compared to 44.5% who have never been a member of a Home and School Association.

2. a. Are you now a member of a Home and School Association?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
Yes	46.6%	21.1%	43.3%	37.8%
No	53.4%	78.9%	56.7%	62.2%

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IV. Analysis: Part 1 (cont'd.)

2. b. Are you now a member of a School Committee?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
Yes	18.4%	10.7%	14.6%	14.7%
No	81.6%	89.3%	85.4%	85.3%

A significantly high number of parents (77%) have never been and are not now (85.3%) members of a School Committee.

44.5% of the parents have never been members of a Home and School Association.

3. a. How would you describe your level of involvement in your community?

	Elementary		High School		Both		Total	
i. Not involved	30.3%		34.7%		27.8%		30.7%	
ii. Slightly involved	39.3%		29.3%		23.6%		31.5%	
iii. Moderately involved	23.6%	69.6%	25.3%	65.3%	38.9%	72.3%	29.5%	69.3%
iv. Very involved	6.7%		10.7%		7.8%		8.3%	

b. How would you describe your level of involvement in your child's school?

	Elementary		High School		Both		Total	
i. Not involved	22.5%		28.9%		30.0%		27.1%	
ii. Slightly involved	24.7%		28.9%		35.6%		29.8%	
iii. Moderately involved	39.3%	77.5%	25.0%	71.0%	24.4%	70.0%	29.8%	72.9%
iv. Very involved	13.5%		17.1%		10.0%		13.3%	

On the whole, parents are more involved in the school than in the community and especially so in the elementary school.

4. a. Do you feel that you could have some influence in solving some problem in your community?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
i. No ii. Probably no	34.4%	25.7%	39.6%	33.7%
iii. Probably yes iv. Definitely yes	65.5%	74.4%	60.4%	66.3%

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IV. Analysis: Part 1 (cont'd.)

4. b. Do you feel that you could have some influence in solving some problem in your child's school?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
i. No ii. Probably no	14.8%	16.4%	19.8%	17.1%
iii. Probably yes iv. Definitely yes	85.2%	83.5%	80.2%	83.0%

Parents feel they have some influence on the community and on the school. However, parents indicate that they can have more efficacy on school problems than on community problems (83.0% vs. 66.3%).

5. a. How satisfied are you with the quality of education that your child is receiving at school?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total	
i. Not satisfied	8.0%	21.1%	17.6%	15.3%	
ii. Somewhat satisfied	42.0%	43.4%	40.7%	42.0%	84.7%
iii. Satisfied	50.0%	35.5%	41.8%	42.7%	

84.7% of parents are satisfied with the quality of education their child is receiving as compared to 15.3% who are not satisfied. 21.1% of the high school parents are not satisfied as compared to 8.0% of the elementary parents. Thus parents of elementary school children are more satisfied than parents of high school children.

b. Do you feel that teachers know best what your child's educational needs are?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
i. Definitely do not know best ii. Probably do not know best	18.2%	23.6%	32.2%	24.8%
iii. Probably know best iv. Definitely know best	81.8%	76.4%	67.8%	75.2%

6% more of the elementary parents as compared to high school parents feel that the teacher knows best. 75.2% of parents indicate confidence in the teachers' assessment of their child's educational needs.

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IV. Analysis: Part 1 (cont'd.)

6. a. How often have you been in contact with your child's principal?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
i. No contact	51.7%	56.5%	59.7%	56.0%
ii. 1 - 3 contacts	41.3%	40.7%	35.8%	39.2%
iii. 4+ contacts	6.8%	2.6%	4.3%	4.7%

b. How often have you been in contact with your child's teacher?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
i. No contact	5.7%	14.4%	11.9%	10.5%
ii. 1 - 3 contacts	81.6%	80.2%	73.9%	78.4%
iii. 4 + contacts	12.6%	5.2%	14.1%	10.9%

c. How often have you contacted the principal concerning other school business?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
i. No contact	70.1%	82.8%	80.4%	77.6%
ii. 1 - 3 contacts	13.7%	9.2%	6.5%	9.8%
iii. 4 + contacts	16.0%	7.8%	13.0%	12.5%

These figures indicate that parents have more contact with the teachers than with the principals. This could be due to the fact that The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal policy encourages parent-teacher interviews at least twice a year.

7. a. Do you feel welcome in your child's school?

	Elementary		High School		Both		Total	
i. Do not participate	15.1%		16.4%		17.6%		16.4%	
ii. Not welcome	0.0%		0.0%		0.0%		0.0%	
iii. Slightly welcome	4.7%		11.0%		8.8%		8.0%	
iv. Moderately welcome	27.9%	84.9%	27.4%	83.6%	27.5%	82.5%	27.6%	83.5%
v. Very welcome	52.3%		45.2%		46.2%		48.0%	

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IV. Analysis: Part 1 (cont'd.)

7. b. As a parent who participates in school functions, how welcome do you feel?

	Elementary	High School	Both	Total
i. Slightly to moderately welcome	38.0%	46.0%	44.0%	43.0%
ii. Very welcome	62.0%	54.0%	56.0%	57.0%

More than half of those parents participating in school functions feel very welcome in the schools.

V. Analysis: Part II

For each decisional situation parents are asked to indicate their present perceived level of participation and their desired level of participation. These responses are made according to a five-point rating scale: "5" representing the highest level of participation and "1" the lowest. Thus the following variables are determined in each decisional situation.

i. Present perceived level of participation.
ii. Desired level of participation.
iii. Level of decisional satisfaction, i.e., the discrepancy between present and desired levels of participation is considered deprivation.

A. Rank Order of Actual Involvement (Greatest to least).

The chart below is to read as follows:

ex. 1. Fund raising: On a scale ranging from 1 - 5 the average response for fund raising is 2.8. This is higher than the mid-point on the scale and indicates a better than average involvement.

ex. 2. Textbooks: The score of 1.3 reveals a minimal degree of involvement.

Sphere I	1. Fund raising	2.8	
Sphere II	2. Closing of schools	2.2	Areas directly affecting the pupils
	3. Types of extra-curricular activities	2.1	
	4. Reporting pupil progress	2.0	

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A. Rank Order of Actual Involvement (Greatest to least) cont'd.

Sphere II cont'd.	5.	Introduction of new subjects	1.9
	6.	Recording information about pupils	1.8
	7.	Introduction of new methods of instruction	1.7
		Disciplinary procedures	1.7
Sphere III	8.	Alterations to school facilities	1.6
		Evaluation of new methods and subjects	1.6
		Community use of the school building	1.5
	9.	Pupil placement	1.5
		Budgeting of school funds	1.5
	10.	Selection of textbooks	1.3

Areas indirectly affecting the pupils

SPHERE I

Fund Raising: This stands out as the one activity in which parents are involved to the greatest extent. Before the advent of School Committees and Consultative Management, this was virtually the only direct involvement parents had with the school. Evidently this tradition has continued.

SPHERE II

The second sphere of activities in which parents are involved, but to a lesser extent than Fund Raising, are those which affect the child directly. These activities are:

Closing of Schools: This entails busing, lunch room facilities and the removal of a neighbourhood school. It is not surprising that this item ranks second since The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal is presently engaged with some communities in deciding the fate of twenty-five underpopulated schools.

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A. Rank Order of Actual Involvement (Greatest to least) cont'd.

Sphere II (cont'd.)

Types of Extra-curricular Activities: Parents are involved in determining their child's after-school activities.

Reporting Pupil Progress: This focuses on pupil evaluation. It has been a lively topic of discussion at the elementary level for approximately 5 years due to the dissatisfaction with the present format of reporting. Indeed, many schools have taken the initiative of designing their own system of reporting.

Introduction of New Subjects: One area where some of the parents have been active are the ~~Reading~~ Reach In and ~~Reading~~ Reach Out programs. They have facilitated bringing community resource people into the classroom and in getting pupils involved in community projects as an integral part of the curriculum.

Recording Information About Pupils: Parents have been very sensitive about the protection of confidential information and supported The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal in its opposition to the compilation by the Government of a central student dossier.

Introduction of New Methods of Instruction and Disciplinary Procedures: Parents are involved since their understanding and cooperation are essential to the success of new ideas in these areas.

SPHERE III

Parents are still involved, but to a lesser degree, in areas that do not directly affect the child. These areas center mainly around topics such as "Alterations to School Facilities", "Budgeting of School Funds" and "Use of School Facilities by Community Organizations".

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B. Rank Order of Desired Involvement (Greatest to least)

Sphere I	1. Closing of schools	4.2	Areas directly affecting the pupils
Sphere II	2. Reporting pupil progress	3.7	
	Types of extra-curricular activities	3.7	
	3. Recording information about pupils	3.6	
	4. Fund raising	3.4	
	Disciplinary procedures	3.4	
	5. Introduction of new subjects	3.3	
	Introduction of new methods of instruction	3.3	
Sphere III	6. Evaluation of new methods and subjects	3.1	Areas indirectly affecting the pupils
	Pupil placement	3.1	
	7. Selection of textbooks	2.8	
	8. Alterations to school facilities	2.7	
	9. Budgeting of school funds	2.6	
	Community use of the school building	2.6	

SPHERE I

One topic, the "Closing of schools" stands out as the priority for desired involvement.

SPHERE II

The next area of desired parental involvement again centers on the individual child in matters such as "Reporting pupil progress", "Types of extra-curricular activities", "Recording information about pupils","Fund raising", "Disciplinary procedures" and "Introduction of new subjects and methods".

In both charts, Actual Involvement and Desired Involvement, Spheres I and II coincide.

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B. Rank Order of Desired Involvement (Greatest to least) cont'd.

SPHERE III

The third and lowest level of desired involvement centers again on areas which do not directly influence the child.

C. Rank Order of Deprivation (Greatest to least)

Deprivation equals the discrepancy between actual involvement and desired involvement.

Sphere I	1.	Closing of schools	2.0
	2.	Recording information about pupils	1.8
	3.	Reporting pupil progress	1.7
		Disciplinary procedures	1.7
	4.	Types of extra-curricular activities	1.6
		Introduction of new methods of instruction	1.6
		Pupil placement	1.6
	5.	Selection of textbooks	1.5
		Evaluation of new methods and subjects	1.5
	6.	Introduction of new subjects	1.4
Sphere II	7.	Alterations to school facilities	1.1
		Budgeting of school funds	1.1
	8.	Community use of the school building	1.0
	9.	Fund raising	.6

Areas directly affecting the pupils

Areas indirectly affecting the pupils

Parents are deprived in all instances. That is, they are not as involved as they would like to be. They are particularly deprived in areas that influence the child directly. The "Closing of schools" is their greatest deprivation even though it is their second area of greatest involvement. Parents feel less deprived in areas which do not directly influence the child.

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C. Rank Order of Deprivation (Greatest to least) cont'd.

Parents feel least deprived in the area of Fund raising, but still deprived, although this is the area where there is the least discrepancy between the level of actual involvement and the level of desired involvement.

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IV. Analysis: Part II

Level of involvement - Yes or No

	Elementary		High School		Both		Total	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Selecting new teacher	20.5%	79.5%	14.7%	85.3%	15.2%	84.8%	16.9%	83.1%
2. Selecting new principal	36.4%	63.6%	26.7%	73.3%	33.7%	66.3%	32.5%	67.5%
3. Teacher evaluation	55.1%	44.9%	54.1%	45.9%	59.8%	40.2%	56.5%	43.5%
4. Principal evaluation	56.2%	43.8%	51.4%	48.6%	62.0%	38.0%	56.9%	43.1%
5. Class placement	30.7%	69.3%	24.3%	75.7%	22.8%	77.2%	26.0%	74.0%

Parents are not especially interested in the class placement of their child or in the selection of new teachers and principals. However, they are slightly more interested in the selection of a new principal than a new teacher. From the comments received it would appear that many parents do not consider themselves qualified to choose personnel.

The higher percentage of interest shown in evaluating teachers and principals indicates a desire to hold the professionals accountable.

V. Conclusion:

1. The parents surveyed expressed satisfaction (85%) with the quality of education their children are receiving in the schools of The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal. However, they do want to hold administrators and teachers accountable.
2. The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal parents (84%) feel welcome in their schools.
3. Parents are involved to a greater or lesser degree in all the areas surveyed, but they would like to have greater input in the decision-making process.

* * * * *

RANK ORDER OF DESIRED INVOLVEMENT COMPARED WITH ACTUAL INVOLVEMENT

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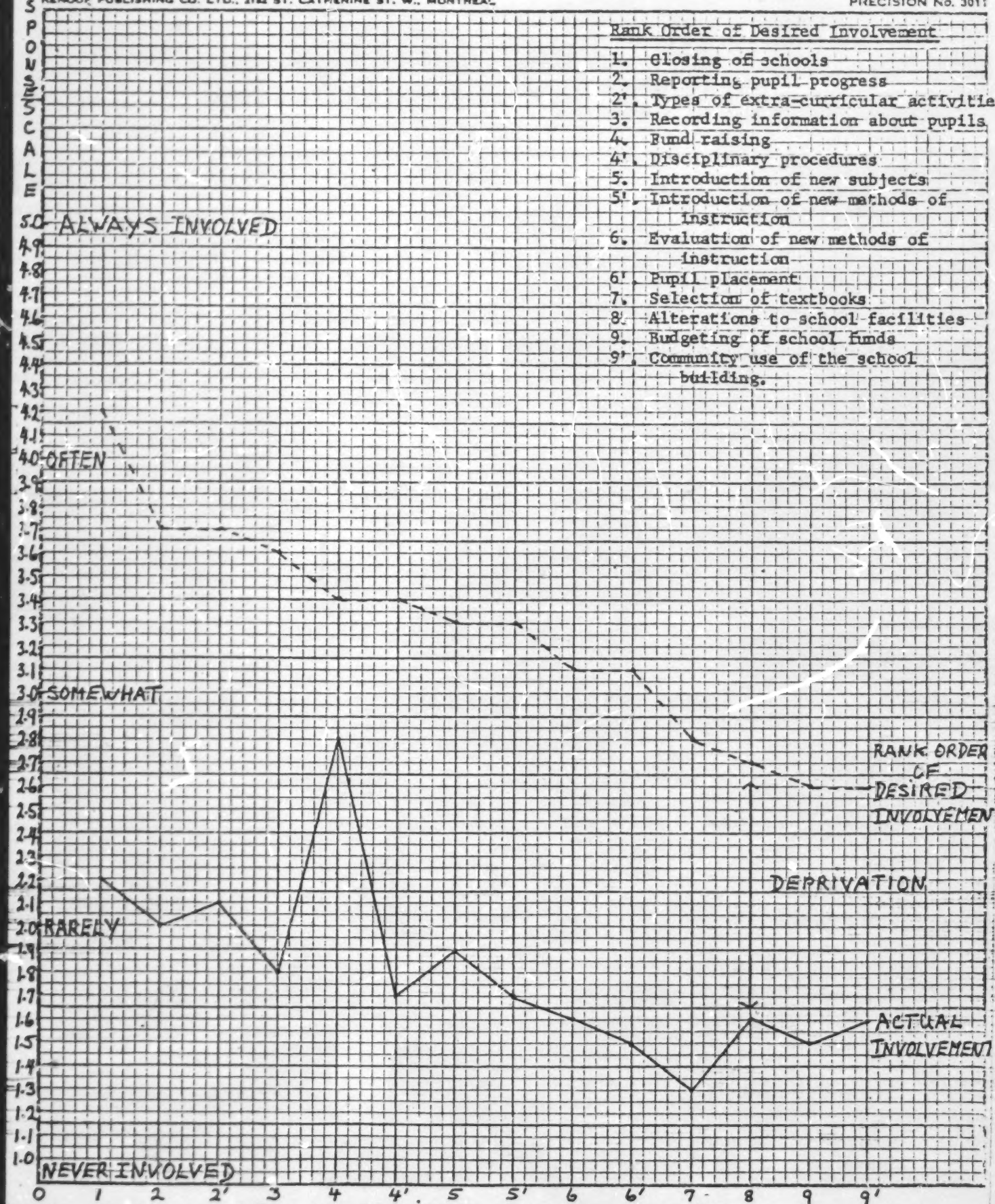

Rank Order of Desired Involvement

1. Closing of schools
2. Reporting pupil progress
2'. Types of extra-curricular activities
3. Recording information about pupils
4. Fund raising
4'. Disciplinary procedures
5. Introduction of new subjects
5'. Introduction of new methods of instruction
6. Evaluation of new methods of instruction
6'. Pupil placement
7. Selection of textbooks
8. Alterations to school facilities
9. Budgeting of school funds
9'. Community use of the school building.

PART I - INFORMATION SHEET

Please fill out this information sheet. Your name is NOT required. This information will be used for statistical purposes only.

1. Please check: Male _____ Female _____

2. What is your age? _____

3. Are there presently one or two parents in your family? One ____ Two ____

4. What is the educational level of you and your spouse?

	Husband	Wife
1. less than high school	____	____
2. completed high school	____	____
3. completed high school + other training	____	____
4. completed university	____	____
5. completed university and beyond	____	____

5. What is your occupation? Husband _____

Wife _____

6. What educational level would you like your child to complete? (Check one)

1. less than high school ____
2. complete high school ____
3. complete high school + other training ____
4. complete university ____
5. complete university and beyond ____

7. Present grade level of your child, or children. (Circle the grade(s)).

Elementary 1 2 3 4 5 6

High School 7 8 9 10 11

8. (a) What was your country of birth? _____

(b) How long have you lived in Canada? ____ years.

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9. (a) Have you ever been a member of a Home and School Association?

Yes _____ No _____

(b) Have you ever been a member of a School Committee? Yes _____ No _____

10. (a) Are you a member of the Home and School Association in your child's school now?

Yes _____ No _____

If "yes", how long have you been a member? _____

(b) Are you a member of the School Committee in your child's school now?

Yes _____ No _____

If "yes", how long have you been a member? _____

11. How would you describe your level of involvement in your community? (Check one).

very involved _____ moderately involved _____

slightly involved _____ not involved _____

12. How satisfied are you with the quality of education that your child is receiving at school?

satisfied _____ somewhat satisfied _____

not satisfied _____

13. (a) Approximately how often have you been in contact with your child's principal this year?

concerning your child _____ times

concerning other school business _____ times

(b) Approximately how often have you been in contact with your child's teacher(s) this year?

_____ times

(c) How would you describe your level of involvement in your child's school? (Check one).

very involved _____ slightly involved _____

moderately involved _____ not involved _____

(Cont'd. page 3.....

14. If you were concerned about some problem in the community in which you live, do you feel you could do anything about it? (Check one).

definitely yes _____ probably not _____

probably yes _____ definitely not _____

15. If you were concerned about some problem in your child's school, do you feel you could do anything about it? (Check one).

definitely yes _____ probably not _____

probably yes _____ definitely not _____

16. When you participate in the functions of your child's school do you feel welcome? (Check one).

very welcome _____ moderately welcome _____

slightly welcome _____ not welcome _____

do not participate _____

17. Do you feel that teachers know best what your child's educational needs are? (Check one).

definitely know best _____ probably do not know best _____

probably know best _____ definitely do not know best _____

(Cont'd. - Part II.....

PART II - INFORMATION SHEET

HOW TO FILL OUT THIS PART. For each type of decision choose the number from the top list which you feel most closely represents:

a. the degree to which the school does involve you in this type of decision
b. the degree to which you want to be involved.

Place the numbers on the lines beside (a) and (b).

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS

1. The school has to make a decision about selecting new textbooks or other educational materials.

   (a) The school does involve me in this _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

2. The school has to make a decision about disciplinary procedures among the pupils in the school.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

3. The school has to make a decision about introducing new methods of instruction.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

4. The school has to make a decision about including a new subject (or subjects) in the school program.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

5. The school has to make a decision about how it can raise funds for activities and supplies not provided for in the regular school budget.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

6. The school has to make a decision about how the success of new instructional methods and new subjects should be judged.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

(Cont'd. pg. 2.....

1	2	3	4	5
NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS

7. The school has to make a decision about how the progress of pupils schould be reported.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

8. The school has to make a decision as to what kind of information should be kept on the pupils.

   (a) The school does involve me in this _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

9. The school has to make a decision about alterations to its facilities.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

10. The school has to make a decision about closing because of declining enrolment.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

11. The school has to make a decision about how it will budget its funds.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

12. The school has to make a decision about the use of the school building by the community outside of school hours.

   (a) The school does involve me in this _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

13. The school has to make a decision about the types of extra-curricular activities that should be provided for the pupils.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

14. The school has to make a decision about how pupils should be grouped for instruction.

   (a) The school does involve me in this. _____

   (b) I want to be involved in this by the school. _____

(Cont'd. Part III.....

PART III - INFORMATION SHEET

Do you feel that parents should be involved in any of the following decisional areas?

Answer "yes" if you feel parents should be involved in these decisions and "no" if they should not.

1. The school has to make a decision about selecting a new teacher.

   Yes _____ No _____

2. The school has to make a decision about selecting a new principal. Yes _____ No _____

3. The school has to make a decision about the success of the work of teachers. (Teacher evaluation) Yes _____ No _____

4. The school has to make a decision about the success of the work of the principal. (Principal Evaluation) Yes _____ No _____

5. The school has to make a decision about how teachers should be assigned to classes. (Class placement). Yes _____ No _____

6. Are there any types of decisions not listed above that you feel that parents hould be involved in? If so, please list them in this space.

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